

THE EXPANSION OF THE CHURCH IN PALESTINE

Acts describes the growth of Christianity from its beginning in Jerusalem, its expansion into Judea and Samaria, and its spread throughout the Roman world (Acts 1:8). After Jesus’ ascension the disciples gathered in Jerusalem. Acts 2 records the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples at the Feast of Weeks/Pentecost. At the time, Jerusalem was filled with Jewish pilgrims from all over the Roman world — a number of whom were converted to the new faith.

Opposition to the early church grew in Jerusalem as more and more Greek-speaking Jews (Hellenists) joined the ranks of Jesus’ followers. As the Jerusalem church scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (8:1), the believers shared their faith with others. For example Philip traveled to a city in Samaria (8:5), where people were converted. Indeed, even Peter and John, who had come to pray for the new converts, willingly preached the gospel in Samaritan villages on their return trip to Jerusalem (8:25).

Philip also traveled south and west of Jerusalem, on the road from Bethlehem to Betogabris. There he met an Ethiopian official riding in a chariot and reading from Isaiah 53. After Philip explained the meaning of the passage, the Ethiopian believed, was baptized, and “went on his way rejoicing”

▼ *Jerusalem: paved street with shops on the west side of the Temple Mount (vertical wall on right). The tumble of boulders is from the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 by the Romans.*



(vv. 26–39), going to Gaza and then west into Africa. Philip then moved into the Philistine Plain (Azotus; 8:40) and eventually settled in Caesarea (21:8).

Peter was also active in the coastal plain area, healing Aeneas at Lydda (Acts 9:32–35) and raising Tabitha from the dead (9:36–42) at Joppa. From there he accepted an invitation to go to the house of Cornelius, a centurion living in Caesarea. Cornelius and others believed. Thus it was from Caesarea that the gospel began to make inroads into the Gentile world.

Meanwhile, the persecution of the church continued in Jerusalem and Judea. Saul, a zealous Pharisee armed with official sanction, traveled to Damascus in order to persecute the believers, but the risen Lord appeared to him and he became a believer (see next chapter).

When Jesus died, Pilate was the Roman governor of Idumea, Judea, and Samaria, while Herod the Great's sons Antipas and Philip still held their positions in the north. Philip died in AD 34, and his territory was transferred to the province of Syria. But in AD 37 the districts were detached from Syria when the Roman emperor Caligula appointed Herod Agrippa I (AD 37–44) as the ruler over Philip's old domain. When in AD 39 Antipas foolishly requested an improvement of his position, he was banished to Gaul, and Galilee and Perea were added to the realm of Herod Agrippa I.

In AD 41 the emperor Claudius, grateful for Agrippa's assistance in helping him secure the throne, added Samaria, Judea, and Idumea to his holdings. With these additions, Agrippa's kingdom was as extensive as that of his grandfather,

EXPANSION OF THE EARLY CHURCH IN PALESTINE AND SYRIA



▼ *Gamala: view to west-southwest of the city, where 9,000 Jews died attempting to defend the city against the Romans — AD 67.*

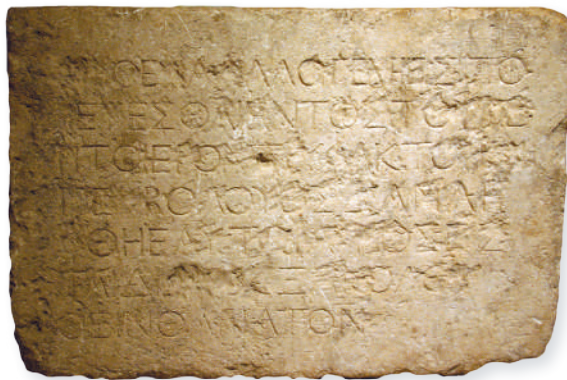


THE NEAR EAST AT THE TIME OF PENTECOST



Herod the Great. However, at the peak of his power Agrippa was struck down with a terminal illness, and he died in Caesarea in AD 44 (Acts 12:19–23; Josephus, *Ant.* 19.8.2 [343–52]).

After Agrippa I's death at Caesarea in AD 44, inept and offensive procurators ruled much of Palestine. Various Jewish groups attempted to revolt, but none was successful. In the meantime, Herod Agrippa II was granted more and more territory by the Romans, so that by the time of the Jewish revolt (AD 66–70), he was in control of Gaulanitis, Batanea, Auranitis, Trachonitis, and portions of Galilee.



▲ Greek inscription, found in Jerusalem, forbidding Gentiles to enter into the more sacred precincts of the temple—Paul was accused of violating this ban (Acts 21:27–29)

During this time Paul was traveling on his three great missionary journeys and returning to Judea after each journey. After his third journey he was imprisoned in Jerusalem, having been accused of bringing a Gentile into the temple area.

Because of a plot on his life, he was transferred by night to Caesarea via Antipatris. Paul spent over two years imprisoned at Caesarea, during which time he appeared before two different procurators, Felix and Festus, as well as before the ascending Jewish king, Agrippa II. In the end, Paul appealed to Caesar.

During the tenure of the Roman governor Florus (AD 64–66), Jews



▲ Rome: Arch of Titus at the entrance to the Forum, depicting the menorah being displayed in Rome after the Jerusalem temple had been destroyed in AD 70.

all over Palestine revolted. In Jerusalem they seized the Temple Mount and the Antonia Fortress, and by the end of the summer of AD 67 all of Jerusalem was under Jewish control. In response, the Roman legate of Syria marched south with the Twelfth Legion, but he failed to retake Jerusalem.

Although the Jewish rebel forces faced serious internal divisions, a Jewish government was established and military commands were set up. The emperor Nero sent his general Vespasian to crush the revolt. Vespasian established his headquarters in Ptolemais. His first objective was to secure the northern part of the country. After retaking Sepphoris, he laid siege to the fortress of Jotapata. Although most of the





London, British Museum

▲ *Head of Titus: as general, he destroyed the temple and Jerusalem and later (AD 79–81) ruled as emperor of Rome.*

defending garrison died, their commander, Josephus, saved his life by surrendering to the Romans. Vespasian then regained the area around the Sea of Galilee. By the end of AD 67 all of Galilee was under Roman control.

Roman troops marched south along the coast, capturing Joppa, Jamnia, and Azotus. To the east they secured Samaritan territory in the Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim region. In






the spring of AD 68 fighting resumed, and Vespasian's goal was first to isolate and then to capture Jerusalem. In June Emperor Nero committed suicide, but Vespasian was able to keep up the pressure in Judea. By midsummer of AD 69 only Jerusalem, the Judean Desert, Masada, and Machaerus remained in Jewish hands.

In the summer of AD 69 Vespasian's troops declared him emperor, and in the summer of AD 70 his son Titus captured Jerusalem. The Romans took the Temple Mount and set fire to the temple. The upper (western) portion of Jerusalem held out for a few weeks longer, but it too fell to the Romans. Although Jerusalem had been captured and destroyed, it was not abandoned, and the Romans stationed the Tenth Legion there to prevent further insurrection.

The capture of Jerusalem in AD 70 marks the end of the Jewish revolt, although the Romans still had to take Masada on the shore of the Dead Sea. There, 960 of the 967 Jewish defenders decided to commit suicide.

In the early second century (AD 132–35) the Jewish people staged a second revolt. Simeon Bar Kokhba was declared the leader of the Jewish people by the highly respected Rabbi Akiba. After some initial success by the Jews, the Romans sent several legions to suppress the revolt. Bar Kokhba abandoned Jerusalem and retreated to Bethther, 7 miles southwest of Jerusalem. The Romans laid siege to his fortress, and he and his garrison were annihilated. Emperor Hadrian ordered Jerusalem to be destroyed and rebuilt as a Roman colony named Aelia Capitolina, and Jews were forbidden to enter the city. He changed the name of the province from Judea to Palestine.

JEWISH REVOLT AGAINST ROME (AD 66–70)

-  First attack of Twelfth Legion to regain Jerusalem
-  Attacks by Vespasian to quell the revolt
-  Titus's capture of Jerusalem
-  Area in revolt
-  Area partially in revolt

